

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



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The  
**MARY HELEN COCHRAN LIBRARY**  
SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE

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THE  
MARY HELEN COCHRAN LIBRARY

JANET M. AGNEW

Librarian

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE  
SWEET BRIAR, VIRGINIA

*Libraries are not made, they grow.*

—AUGUSTINE BIRRELL: *Obiter Dicta*

AD 1929  
IN MEMORY OF FERGUS REID  
IN MEMORY OF HIS MOTHER  
MRS HELEN COCHRAN

## THE MARY HELEN COCHRAN LIBRARY

Landmarks in the life of an institution are no less significant than in the life of an individual. At such times it is natural and healthy to look back, to evaluate the measure of accomplishment, and to look to the future. This year includes two landmarks in the life of the library of Sweet Briar College and it occasions a double reason for self-examination. Particularly is this so if one concedes that no better picture of the growth of a college can be obtained than that presented by the development of its library.

Fifteen years have passed since the June day in 1929 when the cornerstone of the Mary Helen Cochran Library was laid. The building itself was made possible through the generous gift of a loyal friend of Sweet Briar, the late Mr. Fergus Reid of Norfolk, who served the college faithfully for thirty-six years as a member of its Board of Directors, of which he was president from 1933 until his death in 1941. It was given in memory of his mother, whose name it bears. For the library, its ensuing installation in a fine Georgian Colonial building was a virtual rebirth, offering exciting possibilities for new growth and widespread development.

The original Sweet Briar library was born on paper on June 8, 1906, when it was written into the by-laws of Sweet Briar Institute that the duties of the librarian were: "To take care of the library rooms with all books, files, records, papers and other property belonging to it." Thus the librarian was charged by law to perform certain designated duties, but upon the opening of the institution on September 5, 1906, the items for which she was to care were notably absent. In order to remedy this vital lack, the Board was asked "to appropriate a sum for the purchase of necessary reference books for the library."

Ready compliance with the request led to an appropriation of funds, money which was obviously spent by one who had sound judgment and crystal-like discernment of the needs of the college girl of 1944 as well as of her pioneering predecessor

of 1906, for one of the first purchases was "The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia." Volume one of the set still wears proudly its No. 1 signifying that it was the first book entered in the accession record of the new library. Though they are now attired in new bindings, these same books, thirty-eight years later, are still usefully serving the orthographic needs of the students.

During its first twenty-three years, the college library grew slowly though steadily. As the number of students increased, it outgrew one room after another and finally it more than filled the small wooden Y.W.C.A. hut into which it had been moved after the last war.

When the Mary Helen Cochran Library was opened in the fall of 1929, room was suddenly available for real expansion. The president, Dr. Meta Glass, and the architect had made plans for two floors of book stacks holding a total of 100,000 volumes. At first shelves were installed in the lower floor only, but by 1936 when these were filled, it was necessary to open the upper floor for additional shelving. Actual accommodation was thus provided for 60,000 volumes.

Expansion was made possible and encouraged by generous grants from the Carnegie Corporation as well as from the administration, and in the next five year period the holdings of the library were increased by well over twelve thousand volumes, not counting pamphlets and added copies of books already held.

In this time of its greatest growth, the Mary Helen Cochran Library was fortunate in having at its head Miss Doris A. Lomer, whose thorough appreciation of good literature and whose understanding of the library needs of a liberal arts college were reflected in the growing book collection. Her vision of these needs was clear and steadfast, and from her arrival in 1929 to her retirement in 1942 she worked with that vision constantly in mind.

Although during the past fifteen years the rate of growth was rapid at first and then became slower, it continued steadily until on February 1, 1944, the sixty thousandth volume was quietly added to the accession record. The book receiving this

number, it is pleasurable to record, was a gift from Dr. Eugene W. Lyman, who has lived at Sweet Briar since his retirement in 1940 from the faculty of Union Theological Seminary. This book, "Religion and the Issues of Life" is of additional interest because it was written by Dr. Lyman here at Sweet Briar.

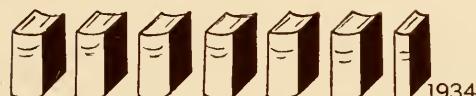
And so another landmark in the growth of the Mary Helen Cochran Library was reached and passed. Although it would seem that the acquisition of sixty thousand volumes in a library whose shelving capacity had been estimated at that figure



#### GROWTH OF THE BOOK COLLECTION



Each symbol represents 5,000 volumes.



might prove a matter of some embarrassment, the shelves are not yet bulging with books. This paradox is explained by several factors, chief of which are the uses to which the books are put, and their distribution in the building itself.

### CIRCULATION AND THE USE OF BOOKS

In the first place, with a yearly circulation of 15,000 books, an average of 1,500 are off the shelves and in the hands of borrowers each month during the academic year. Included in this total number are reserve books available only for overnight leave from the library. These books, averaging this past year 1,800 a semester, are shelved for convenience in the Reading Room and it is there that they are chiefly used although as previously said they may be withdrawn for one night loans.

Approximately another thousand volumes which never leave the building are the reference books, kept in the Reading Room where they are easily accessible to all. Other books which are available under the same conditions are the art books and the music books, both types being shelved in specially designated rooms.

That circulation figures do not show a true picture of the use of the book collection is indicated by the fact that every day books taken from the reference and reserve collections are read in the Reading Room, in the Art Room, in the Music Room. Every day, too, books are used in the stacks. Likewise there are no figures to indicate the circulation of the science books which are kept and used in the laboratories.

Impetus for the circulation of books comes primarily from the classroom and for the most part the books borrowed are for collateral reading for course work. But other means are also used to stimulate interest in reading. Leisure time reading is encouraged in various ways, chief of which is the provision of a Browsing Room where, in a room arranged much like a library in anyone's home and furnished with comfortable chairs, works of fiction, poetry, essays, biography, drama and travel—modern books and classics alike—invite the reader to take them from the shelves. Here old favorites may be re-read



A fourth of Sweet Briar's 450 students can be accommodated in the Main Reading Room. The Study Gallery, at the upper left, provides additional working space.

or new acquaintances can be made. The Browsing Room collection, which now includes over a thousand volumes, has been built up chiefly through gifts from interested benefactors. The greatest number of these books came at the time of the opening of the library, but in the intervening years many new donors have added to this special collection. These books are not, however, available for circulation.

Enticingly within the reach of every student as she enters the lobby are several shelves of new books of general interest, to which are added from time to time books taken from the stacks with a view to enlisting the interest of readers. Since the books on these shelves are changed frequently, students are constantly pausing to glance at titles, thumb through two or three volumes, and select some for dormitory reading.

As has been indicated, one of the means of testing the use made of any library is through the circulation figures. Of course there is no guarantee that a book taken from the library is actually read, but these figures offer the most commonly used method of gauging interest in and use of books in a collection. How different is today's emphasis on encouraging students to borrow books from the practices in colleges a century ago. A story is told of the librarian of one of our largest university libraries who upon meeting the president of the institution was asked about the disposition of the books in his charge. "Splendid," replied the librarian. "Every book is on the shelves except one and I know which professor has it. I am on my way to get it now." It is easy to see why a librarian in those days was often aptly called "Keeper of Books." Today's librarian is seriously concerned only if the books remain on the shelves, unwanted.

Sweet Briar students of this generation are given a great opportunity to make themselves at home in the world of books. The stacks and other collections are opened freely for their use. If it is true that "browsing in a library is the only way in which time can be profitably wasted," then each girl is encouraged to be profligate with hours. It is with the hope of increasing the small circle of literary gourmets, of engendering a real love of good reading and a firm understanding of the uses and benefits of books that these privileges are extended to every student when she begins her first year at Sweet Briar.

This contact with the books themselves instead of always through the cold impersonal approach of the card catalogue is probably the greatest single service offered the students. To help further this contact, tables are placed in the stacks where students may work in close proximity to the books of their varied interests.

Open access to the stacks has been discontinued in some colleges because of the great loss of books. It is a pleasure to record that at Sweet Briar no such stringent measure has ever been contemplated, the loss of books being so negligible. The Student Government Association has high standards and the students themselves deem it a privilege to live up to them.



Independent study is encouraged for all students through free access to the stacks.



Serving at the Circulation Desk is one of the duties of student assistants who are earning part of their college expenses by working in the library.

A self-service system of book withdrawals is used, whereby students take books to the circulation desk, sign the cards, and stamp on the necessary forms the date on which each book is due. This expedites the service, a procedure which contrasts vividly with one of the old rules in a large university library: "Students shall come to the library four at a time when sent for by the librarian, and they shall not enter the library beyond the table of the librarian on penalty of a fine for each offence." One wonders how in days when restrictions were so stringent any student had the temerity even to set foot inside a library.

**FRESHMAN READINGS:** Every college wants to give its students the opportunity to know some of the outstanding books, old and modern, and each has its own method of furthering its plans. In cooperation with the English department at Sweet Briar, the library has made available many of these books, those with a lasting appeal—plays, novels, biographies, essays, poems—in attractive editions. As a further aid to students, a small bibliography is issued in which these works are classed by type, just as the books are arranged on the

shelves in the Reading Room. Always "on exhibit," these more than two hundred suggested titles have a healthy circulation record.

Students are an inquisitive lot, and their curiosity is to be fostered when it runs along intellectual lines. To assume, however, that only intelligent questions are asked by the students reflects an overly optimistic view of their intellectual attainments, as every librarian knows. Guidance and encouragement, stimulation and direction are needed by all students, and the staff of a college library must be always ready to supply help along these lines. Granted, most of the queries which come to the reference desk have to do with papers being written in connection with course work, some by their very nature are shown to be the first fruits of independent reading. These last are most warmly welcomed, and their numbers give the lie to that old librarian who wrote in his almanack in 1773, "Be suspicious of Women. They are given to the reading of frivolous Romances, and at all events, their presence in a Library adds little to that aspect of Gravity, Seriousness and Learning which is its greatest glory."

The present day library staff of a woman's college feels that if a girl has really learned to read and to use books and libraries during her college days there need be little concern for the later growth of her intellectual life.

### THE COLLECTION

And of what does this collection of more than 60,000 volumes consist? Title by title how does it stand beside other libraries of a comparative size in colleges offering a similar type of work in liberal arts?

The accepted measuring rod used to evaluate the worth of a college library is "A List of Books for College Libraries," prepared by Charles Shaw and issued in connection with the Carnegie Corporation book appropriations. Although the book is relatively unselective and is now out of date it is still useful, for as Blanche McCrum (librarian of Wellesley College) has said ". . . it has been found that libraries having a high percentage of the titles listed in Shaw tend to be excellent in their

whole book stock. On the contrary, those having fifty percent or less of the recommended titles should be seriously uneasy about their adequacy." Since the Mary Helen Cochran collection does not come under the second category it can perhaps be assumed that it is a well selected collection of books for a liberal arts college. Nor is its quality being lowered as the years go by.

PERIODICALS: Since the popularity and usefulness of the periodical was first discovered in the early seventeenth century, the presses of the world have kept pouring forth an ever increasing supply. Much of the material needed in contemporary college work is not covered by books or else it is released first through the periodical channel, and for this reason it is necessary if intelligent work is to be done to have as large holdings as possible of these up-to-the-minute sources. Particularly is this true of the social studies (government, economics, history, sociology), psychology, and the sciences. As these subjects have grown in the interest of the students, it has been found



Current periodicals and daily newspapers are kept in the Periodical Room, which is also used frequently for exhibits and displays.

necessary to increase the periodical literature. Sociology had no place in the early Sweet Briar catalogue; no more did psychology. Considering the shifts of interest and emphasis throughout the years, it is perhaps not surprising that during the past fifteen years the periodical subscriptions have more than doubled, indeed almost tripled, resulting in today's representative collection of 360 current journals useful for every course in the curriculum, including also magazines of general interest.

The worth of a college library is measured in part by its periodical holdings, current volumes and bound past issues, treasured as reference sources. In 1929, the periodical subscriptions in the Mary Helen Cochran Library numbered 115 and there were few back files of any periodicals. Records of ten years earlier show only sixty-one magazine entries, of which a third were regularly bound. One of the pursuits in which the library has since been engaged is to fill in the complete sets of the most used and worthwhile periodicals, no mean task considering that it was late in entering the chase and that periodical literature soon goes out of print. However, the pursuit has been gratifyingly successful, so much so that thousands of these bound volumes are now available.

**MEREDITH COLLECTION:** The Mary Helen Cochran Library today has only one special collection that is really significant. This is the George Meredith collection, given to the college by the late Elmer Bailey, former professor of English at Sweet Briar. It consists mostly of first editions of Meredith's works, letters, manuscripts and pictures, with additional books, articles and other objects concerning his life and writings, more than four hundred items in all.

**ESTILL COLLECTION:** In 1934, Alice Garth Estill was graduated from Sweet Briar and in honor of her graduation her mother, Mrs. George C. Estill, gave to the library a collection of books on the South, written and published before, during, and after the War Between the States. Primarily of an historical character, the collection also includes some titles of fiction. First editions and rare issues are preponderant among the seventy-two items,

which are shelved in two special cases. Particularly valuable is a file of the Richmond News-Leader covering the four war years.

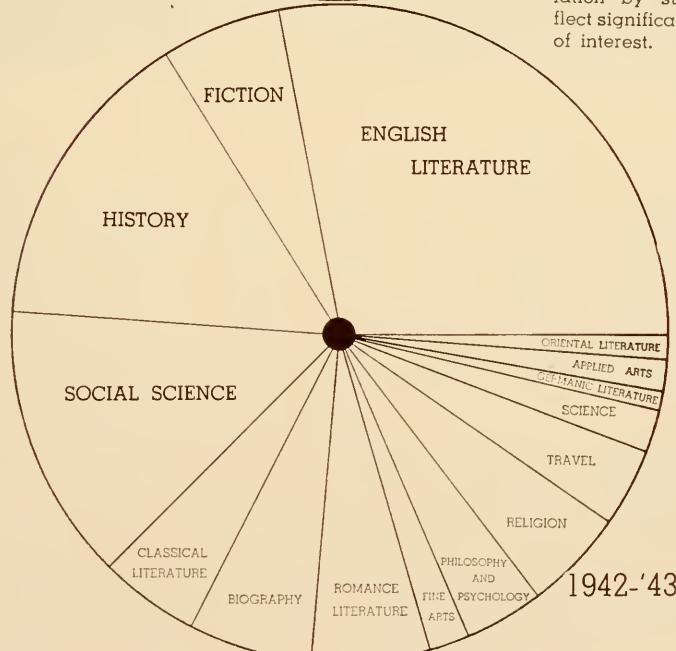
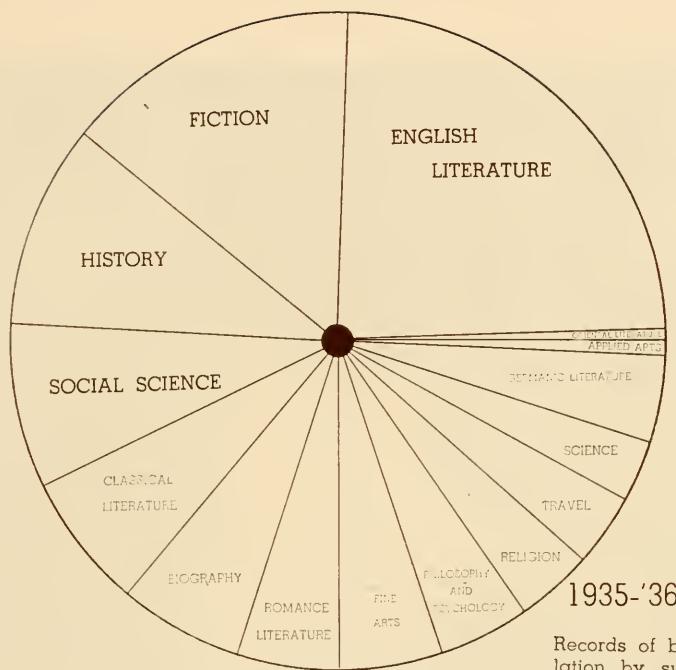
Unfortunately it has not been possible, with the present library budget, to add to the Meredith and Estill Collections.

CARRY NATURE SANCTUARY COLLECTION: A gift to Sweet Briar in 1936 from Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Carry of Chicago, parents of an alumna, Margaret Carry Durland, was the establishment here of the Carry Nature Sanctuary in memory of their son, Charles William Carry. From this endowment a small sum has this year for the first time been made available for the purchase of books concerning nature and wild life, books which aim to stimulate interest in these subjects. This nucleus, it is hoped, will eventually be expanded into a fine collection. It seems most appropriate that in a college situated as Sweet Briar is, in the midst of several thousand acres of fields and woodlands, a really splendid collection of this sort should be developed, a collection which could serve not only the college students but interested people of the state of Virginia as well.

Another small collection, of more varied subject matter than the above, consists of books belonging to the Fletcher and Williams families, forbears of the founders of the college. These are mostly eighteenth and nineteenth century imprints.

Justification for collecting books written by and about women need not be sought in a woman's college. Sweet Briar has a small collection of this kind, and hopes that it will be increased through gifts and purchases.

Though not specially endowed, the Art and Music collections have been aided by the benefits contributed by the Carnegie Corporation and other interested donors. The Art collection, numbering over 1,800 titles concerned with every aspect of art also includes over 3,700 mounted pictures, which are used extensively by the Art department and appear frequently in exhibits in the library. The Music collection, though not so outstanding, is ascertained to be a good working collection of 1,500 books for the needs of courses given in a liberal arts college. The acquisition of both these collections was a large factor in establishing in 1935 a major in Music, and one in Art, listed in the 1937-38 catalogue for the first time.





Students pause to examine new books conveniently displayed in the lobby.

It is axiomatic to say that a college is able to expand its courses only in so far as library material is available. The introduction of new courses to the curriculum, as listed in the Sweet Briar catalogue, tallies with the procurement of books relating to those subjects. Among them are geography and Latin-American history, to name but two of the fields in which courses have been offered for the first time within the past two years. Similarly, Reading for Honors, calling for tutorial methods of teaching, was initiated only when the library's holdings had attained sufficient scope to warrant it. The interdependence of courses and book stock is indisputable.

Close correlation between departmental offerings and the library's book stock is possible because of the responsibility that rests on the members of the Sweet Briar College faculty for the selection of books. In a truly democratic way, the newest

instructor as well as the most experienced professor is given the opportunity to suggest books in his field. These suggestions are discussed in departmental meetings, and the final selections are submitted to the Library Committee by the heads of departments. In this way the librarian, with the aid of the committee, sees that a balanced development is maintained.

Selecting books of a general nature, books intended for circulation and those classified solely as reference works, is a further responsibility of the librarian, who must also guard against omissions in those fields in which no courses are offered at Sweet Briar, although they are recognized as belonging within the scope of a liberal education.

### GIFTS

No gift to the library is insignificant. For each donation, small or large, there is real gratitude. In its comparatively short life the library has been remembered by many interested persons, and there is a sincere hope that in the future "it will be remembered by a great many more.

Harvard University's pioneer work in establishing a "Friends of the Library" group has had wide-spread influence, many colleges throughout the country having followed this lead. That such a group, "Friends of the Mary Helen Cochran Library," will some day be formed is perhaps not too vain a hope. A spirited group of interested persons can do much for the welfare of a college library.

Even without such an organization the library has fared well. Some of the special gifts have already been enumerated. One of the earliest recorded is a donation from Dean Virginia Gildersleeve, who returned an honorarium given to her by the college, stipulating that the money be used for the purchase of some desired reference work. This sum provided the nucleus for the later purchase of the great Oxford English Dictionary.

The Mary Helen Cochran Library has also been greatly enriched by three benefactors who have given generously of their personal libraries to augment its holdings in several categories. Mr. Hugh S. Worthington, for thirty-four years professor

of French at Sweet Briar, has contributed many books in the field of French literature, some of them given in memory of his mother, Nancy Taliaferro Worthington, and others in memory of his wife, Helen Coale Worthington. Mr. Worthington has also established a fund, the interest from which is used for the purchase of special items in Romance literature. In the same field are books which belonged to the late Miss Alannede Bartlett, who also taught French here for many years. Those given by the late Miss Elizabeth Czarnomska, professor of Religion, chiefly enlarged both English and Biblical literature holdings.

In addition to his gift of the Meredith Collection, Professor Bailey gave a considerable number of other books in English literature which are of value to the general collection.

Not to be overlooked are the yearly gifts to the library from the Committee on Faculty Research. Though its budget is not large, this committee is able to purchase books needed by various members of the faculty in research work, books that would not ordinarily be bought by the library. Eventually these find their way to the shelves as welcomed gifts.

Of interest among the gifts to the library, whose real value was not discovered until this year, is a copy of "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," modestly designated as the gift of "A Friend" a decade ago. Listed as volume number 28,115 in the accession record, the book seemed in no way remarkable until a member of the library staff recognized one of the distinguishing marks of a first edition. By carefully checking bibliographies, verifying and weighing the established points against those of the library's copy, the volume was happily identified as a true first edition. Recognized for its worth, the book was removed from its erstwhile resting place in the American literature section of the stacks, and placed with its rare brothers in the locked stack, repository for the library's most treasured items.

Several months ago, an alumna sent a gift of fifty dollars to be used for new purchases for the Browsing Room, purchases that otherwise could not have been considered. More recently, the library received a gift from the Alumnae Association, a sum given in memory of the late Mr. William B. Dew, treasurer of

Sweet Briar College from 1906 until his retirement in 1942. At Mrs. Dew's request it will be used to buy biographies.

It is such unexpected gifts as these that have enabled the Mary Helen Cochran Library in many cases to obtain useful and desirable books which could not be included in its regular budget.

### EXHIBITS

Like most persons, students like to look at displays and exhibits, and in the course of a year many different exhibits, large and small, are shown in the library. Some are connected with phases of classroom work, some have timely interest in a general way, and some merely show off the library's wares, its cherished items as well as its more pedestrian possessions. Mimeographed book lists are offered with some of these displays, pointing up the library's holdings in a particular subject. This year, for example, lists were offered in connection with exhibits about our allies, China and Russia. Another presented holdings in modern poetry in the Mary Helen Cochran Library.



The first floor corridor is the library's exhibit hall.

Among the large exhibits that have been featured recently are: Periodicals Yesterday and Today; the Manuscript and the Printed Book, an historical presentation of printing through the centuries; Faculty Publications; and special art displays, such as the recent one of Walt Disney originals, sponsored by the Art department. Occasionally exhibits come on loan, a few of this year's being: "British Women at War," from the British Library of Information; "Pre-Columbian Art and Mexican Art," from the Brooklyn Museum; "The Soviet People at War," from the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship.

#### PROVISION FOR WAR INFORMATION

Situated as it is in the country, the Mary Helen Cochran Library, away from the industrial centers, has had no call to act as a War Information Center, nor has it been called upon to provide materials to aid research, or to supply technical information necessary to the war effort.

Lacking such calls, the library's principal aim has been to make available for students and faculty members, honest, unprejudiced, authoritative material on today's affairs and problems in full realization of what has so often been said, that books are weapons in this war of ideas. One college president has remarked, "If there ever was a time when students should have access to accurate information and sound advice, free from hysteria, this is such a time." Sweet Briar students have that opportunity in large measure.

By the purchase of this type of material, by the acquisition of timely pamphlets and periodicals, and by exhibits covering war-time interests (salvage, Red Cross, the post-war world, etc.) the library has sought to meet its obligation to the community.

Active participation in the Victory Book Campaigns, when hundreds of good books were collected and forwarded to headquarters, and equally active response to the plea for books for prisoners of war have also been a part of the library's war program.



The Study Gallery, which accommodates 50 students, is the only room remaining open after the regular library hours.

The development of the Mary Helen Cochran Library, as indicated in this brief history, would not have been possible without the encouragement of President Glass. She saw, soon after becoming president, that Sweet Briar, a liberal arts college, could not be firmly rooted without a library of considerable worth and dimensions. Throughout the nineteen years of her administration, her unfailing interest and wise council have been in large measure responsible for fashioning the useful working instrument that the library of Sweet Briar College is today.

## THE LIBRARY TOMORROW

And what of the future of the Mary Helen Cochran Library? Having risen to its present status, what plans are now being made for it?

Since its book stock has been almost tripled in the last fifteen years, it looks to a future of less spectacular but steady development. At its present rate of growth—about 2,500 volumes a year—the next fifteen year period should see the collection attain its intended capacity of 100,000 volumes.

Will this collection of 1959 differ materially from that of today? That it will differ to any great extent is not now envisioned. Sweet Briar College is a four year liberal arts college and because of this very fact the major types of subject acquisitions are almost pre-determined. Much of the essential background material is now in the library, but there remain many gaps to be filled.



The quiet comfort of the Browsing Room invites leisure time reading.

The library recognizes its responsibility to provide material which by its very nature belongs to a liberal arts college, even though no courses in particular would call for it. To a degree, it is more needed for that very reason. This is the responsibility which has prompted the acquisition of material in folk-lore and Oriental literature, in geology and anthropology, for example. Without representative listings of this nature the library's collection could not be considered well balanced, and because of this, books and periodicals for these and similar subjects are sought and acquired.

But having a well balanced book collection is not sufficient. The real test of a college library's worth is the use to which these books are put by the students. An average of thirty books a year are currently borrowed by each student at Sweet Briar. This does not mean that every student borrows and reads that many books. It would be ostrich-like to ignore the regrettable fact that some students are book shy, even to the extent of not borrowing for outside use a single book during the college year.

Without a catalogue a library is a collection of paper and print. Without readers a college library is a static, pathetic organization, without purpose. Only when the contact between book and reader is made does a library come to life. To strengthen and enlarge its book collection and to encourage the intelligent and enthusiastic use of this collection by the students are the guiding objectives for the Mary Helen Cochran Library.





